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ABSTRACT

Intended for parents of handicapped children, the booklet provides guidelines for working effectively with a variety of professionals. Sections address the following areas: selecting a professional; making an appointment with medical, psychology, educational, and social services professionals; the professional interview; preparing for a professional examination; the child's examination by medical professionals (pediatrician, neurologist, child psychiatrist, orthopedic specialist, ophthalmologist, and optometrist), psychology professionals (psychologist), and educational professionals (educational diagnostician, speech pathologist, audiologist, physical therapist, and occupational therapist). Also considered are the followup conference, options for obtaining another professional opinion, and the parent's role in treatment. (SBH)

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You and the Professional: A Team

Working with Professionals Who Will Assist You and Your Handicapped Child

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Introduction

This booklet was prepared as a guide for parents of handicapped children to help them work effectively with a variety of professionals. Parents often face certain problems in dealing with professionals. For example, professionals may explain their findings in technical jargon, leading to the frustration of unclear communication. Some professionals may have limited time to spend with parents, and they may not want to deal with parents' emotional reactions to the difficult situations they face in raising a handicapped child. Parents may receive conflicting diagnoses and recommendations from different sources, making them feel angry and disillusioned with professionals in general. As a result, they may reject good advice and seek other opinions, beginning an endless merry-go-round of frustrating contacts in their attempts to find the "right" kinds of help.

Parents should understand that the professionals who treat their handicapped children are faced with concerns of their own. Problems in the area of malpractice insurance have led physicians to use additional caution when making diagnoses and recommending treatment. Also, most professions now have within their own ranks severe critics of their performance with the public. While such internal criticism is leading to reform in terms of the kinds and quality of services offered to consumers, it also creates pressure for the concerned professional. Finally, pressure is exerted on professionals by parent and child advocacy groups. One result of this has been the development of consumer-oriented laws. For instance, parents are now entitled by law to view all records concerning their children which are held by any publicly-funded community resource. Parent advocacy groups have also made gains in educating professionals to be more sensitive and straightforward in their dealings with the handicapped and their families.

In spite of the trend toward consumer-oriented change, it is still the responsibility of the parent to assume an active role in the professional-parent relationship. To do this, parents need to know what services they should expect from the professional and understand their own role in the diagnosis and treatment of their child. This booklet is intended to help parents establish a productive partnership with the professional.

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How to Select a Professional

As parents of a handicapped child, you may have the responsibility of selecting the professionals who will provide your child with the special services he needs. You are likely to be dealing with professionals in medicine, psychology, education, and social services.

In order to choose the professionals who will assist you and your child, you must first locate them within your community. Your family doctor can help you do this by referring you to competent practitioners known to him. Organizations like the County Medical Society or State Psychology and Social Work Associations can also be helpful. Other resources include local or statewide associations for parents of handicapped children; community mental health centers; hospital or university affiliated clinics; or local school superintendents and directors of pupil personnel. Some hospitals have special patient clinics for handicapped children. Professionals in these programs have had special training and experience with children with various handicapping conditions. Many of these clinics also offer special dental care programs.

As you begin to make these professional contacts, it is important for you to feel confident about the quality of service being offered to your child. You should feel free to ask questions and voice your concerns. It is appropriate for you to ask professionals about the degree, certification, or license they hold. You may also want to know where they received their professional training and how much experience they have had with children who have the same handicapping condition as your child. Competent professionals will understand your interest and concern and will readily answer such questions. Those who refuse to provide the information you request should be avoided.

It is also important to select professionals who are comfortable discussing any personal concerns you have as the parents of a handicapped child. A readiness to listen to your concerns, an attempt to understand your situations, and a willingness to openly explore difficulties with you are qualities you should seek out.

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How to Make an Appointment

THE MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

Diagnostic medical services will generally begin with your family doctor or your child's pediatrician. It is helpful to write down observations and questions you will want to discuss with the doctor before making an appointment with him. When you call, be sure to tell his nurse or receptionist exactly what your concerns are. The more details you give, the more likely it is that she will schedule adequate time for the examination.

When you make an appointment, it is pertectly appropriate to inquire about fees. You may be covered by medical insurance, such as Blue Cross, Blue Shield, Medicaid or other programs, which will either completely or partially cover the doctor's evaluation fee. The doctor's office can answer questions about coverage on many types of policies. If you find that you are eligible for insurance coverage, you should find out the payment procedures that your doctor follows.

If your doctor refers you to a specialist, be sure to obtain his exact name, address, and phone number. You might wish to ask your doctor to mention several specialists and describe their qualifications. Finally, you might want to be referred to a center or clinic that specializes in the type of problem your child has. When you phone to make an appointment at a clinic or with a specialist, be ready to provide specific information about your child. Often, the "intake" person (the person answering the phone) will have a specific outline of questions. He might ask your child's birthdate, and question you about your child's past medical history. Be sure to ask the intake person how long the appointment will take, so that you and your child will be prepared.

Medical appointments, especially if they involve a series of diagnostic procedures, may spread out over a lengthy period. It can be helpful to keep a record of all your appointments. You will want to list doctors' names; addresses; information needed for each appointment; dates you contacted people to forward reports; and other information that will help you keep an orderly record of your child's contacts. The Taking Charge booklet in this series provides a Calendar of Professional Contacts Form for you to list this information. When making appointments or requesting records to be forwarded, be sure to write down the name of the nurse or secretary with whom you speak. Then, if there is confusion, you can check your appointment book to verify what you have done.

THE PSYCHOLOGY PROFESSIONALS

When you call to make an appointment, you should be prepared to give some preliminary information to the psychologist or his secretary. He will want to know the age of your child and the nature of the problem as you see it. You should also be ready to describe other professional services your child has received. The psychologist might ask you to sign a release form, which allows other professionals to send him information about your child which he can use in preparing for your visit.

When making an appointment, it is perfectly appropriate to ask about fees. You should also check your insurance policy to see if you are covered for this expense. Some insurance companies do not provide coverage for psychological services. Others will reimburse only for services of a doctoral level psychologist or one who works under the supervision of a physician. You should clear up any questions regarding insurance coverage and payment procedures at the time you make your appointment. You should also ask how long the initial examination will take, to help prepare yourself and your child for the appointment.

THE EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS

Special Education Teacher: Your child's teacher collects anecdotal information, results of educational tests, and general impressions of your child's overall functioning in school. If your child is going through a diagnostic procedure, it might be helpful to contact his teacher in order to personally discuss this information. Normally, physicians, psychologists, and diagnostic agencies will ask for school records.

The method for contacting teachers for appointments varies according to the school. Some schools have formal procedures whereby the principal arranges all appointments. In others, you can informally arrange an appointment by talking to the teacher before or after class. If you are not sure of the procedure, call the school office and explain your situation to the secretary. She will probably leave a note for the teacher to call you and you can arrange the appointment at that time. If possible, avoid appointments before school or during the lunch hour, because of teachers' strict schedules. After-school conferences, or a prearranged time when the teacher has been relieved of classroom duties, provide a more relaxed situation. Some teachers are willing to plan evening meetings or a visit to your home. In any event, your personal contact with the teacher will help you relay information to other professionals. It may also encourage the teacher to provide the other professionals with more extensive or precise information than he would ordinarily offer.

Educational Diagnostician: The diagnostician works closely with the special education teacher. It is a good idea to arrange your appointment either through your child's teacher, or with his knowledge, so that the teacher can be present to explain the educational program that resulted from the diagnosis. Procedures for making the appointment are the same as those for contacting the special education teacher.

Therapists: Speech pathologists, audiologists, physical therapists, and occupational therapists are usually connected with a school or a clinic. In most cases, you are referred to a therapist by another professional. When making an initial appointment, you will probably speak with a secretary. You should tell the secretary who referred you to the therapist and why, and provide her with any personal information she requests about your child. Because the time required for examinations may vary, be sure to ask how long the examination will take in order to help prepare yourself and your child.

THE SOCIAL SERVICES PROFESSIONALS

The Social Worker: The social worker is interested in gaining an understanding of your family. Therefore, when you set up an appointment with the social worker it is advisable to have your spouse present or to know your spouse's schedule. Ordinarily, both parents are needed for the initial interview. However, if you are divorced and do not wish to be interviewed with your former spouse, separate conferences can be arranged. Be sure to inquire about the length of the interview, as this may vary.

In many agencies, the social worker will be the first person to interview you, since he is responsible for gathering a great deal of background information. When calling for an appointment, inquire about this so that you will be ready to discuss the necessary information.

The social worker may want to interview you in your home. The purpose of home visits is to obtain family background information, and to see you and your family in your own environment.

Some agencies use a lengthy family intake form which will be sent to you before your appointment with the social worker. The social worker will have this form in hand and use it as a guide for further questions. This saves time in gathering routine information, so that the social worker can spend more time becoming acquainted with you.

The Professional Interview

Medical, psychological, and social work professionals all have training in conducting the "intake" interview. The purpose of the interview is to obtain relevant background information about your child before examining him. The information can be divided into specific areas.

Family history will include information about you, the parents, and your family background. If there is a possible genetic or hereditary factor in your child's problem, specific information about all living and known relatives will be required. It is a good idea to sit down ahead of time and outline your family tree, including information about diseases, emotional problems, or other unusual characteristics of family members. The intake interviewer may also request information from you and your spouse about your emotional and social growth within your own families. Some agencies may give you structured family history forms to fill out at home or in the waiting room. These will form the basis for a later interview.

Family dynamics deal with the interrelationships of your immediate family, including your spouse and children. The intake worker will try to reach an understanding of how your family functions. What are the roles of the father and mother in providing income and caring for the children? Questions may sometimes seem rather personal, but you should be prepared to be open and cooperative. If you have questions about why certain topics are raised, you have the right to inquire.

Birth history refers to the period from the conception to the birth of your handicapped child. All hospitals and obstetricians keep records of progress during pregnancy. You should see if your obstetrician has this information available and give him permission to release it.

Medical history should include a complete record of all your child's illnesses, both chronic and short-term. Since you may not remember the dates and details of significant medical events, it will be helpful to have your doctor forward the relevant medical records before the interview. A complete medical history will also provide information about the health of parents, siblings, and relatives. The purpose of this is to identify any possible hereditary factors in your child's handicap.

Developmental history deals with the various stages of your child's development. Was your child bottle-fed or breast-fed? When was he weaned? When did he first sit up, walk, and talk? Generally, any difficulties your handicapped child has had with toilet training or in building relationships with your or his siblings will be questioned.

Educational history refers to the child's academic progress. This will include his teacher's comments and his test scores.

You can record all of this information prior to your visit on the forms provided in the Taking Charge booklet of this series. Once they are completed, you can bring the whole workbook with you to the professional interview. By referring to what you have already recorded, you will be able to supply the professional with the background information he needs about your child.

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General Comments

PREPARING YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILD FOR A PROFESSIONAL EXAMINATION

Your child has a right to know what a professional examination will involve. He may have fears and concerns which, to you, seem unrealistic. However, they are very real to him, and he should be encouraged to discuss them. If he knows what to expect, he will be able to relax and behave as normally as possible during the examination.

The information you give your child should be direct and honest. If a procedure is going to be uncomfortable, he should be told ahead of time. You should also explain why the procedure is needed, and reassure your child that the discomfort will not last. You may want to ask the professional to explain each examination procedure as it takes place, so that your child is aware at all times of what is happening to him and why.

It is a good idea to tell your child where you are going to be while he is being examined, and where you will meet him afterward. This will help relieve any fear he may have of being left alone. Also, if your child is old enough to understand, he should be told approximately how long the examination will last.

You, as a parent, should understand as fully as possible the procedures involved in your child's examination. If you are unsure of what the examination will entail, you may want to check with the examiner beforehand. Then, you can not only describe the examination more clearly to your child, but you can deal with any anxieties you yourself may feel about what your child will undergo. It is essential that you know what a professional is looking for when he examines your child so that you can understand the results of the evaluation and see to it that the professional's recommendations for treatment are followed.

Your Child's Examination

THE MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

The Pediatrician: The pediatrician is responsible for monitoring the general growth and development of your child. His examination should take from ten to thirty minutes, depending upon your child's cooperation, the doctor's personal style, and possible distractions. Some parts of the routine examination may be done by a paramedic (such as a medical technician, nurse technician, or physician's assistant) who works under the doctor's supervision.

Your child's height, weight and head size will be measured. This will be recorded for future reference in order to chart his growth. Eyes and ears will be examined. With babies, there will be an initial screening to find out if the child can see and hear. As your child becomes older, the doctor is able to do a more complete assessment because your child is able to communicate more information to him. By the time your child is four, the doctor will be able to test his hearing ability for a wide range of sounds. The pediatrician will also test your child's near and far vision, and his color vision. All parts of your child's body will be examined. By touching the abdomen, your doctor will be able to examine internal organs like the kidneys. After the age of three, your child's blood pressure will be taken.

Immunizations are an important part of preventive pediatrics. A schedule will be set up for your child to be given the necessary shots to prevent such diseases as polio, diptheria, measles and tetanus.

Laboratory tests are also part of routine preventive medicine. A blood test will be done at least once a year by taking some blood from your child's finger, to investigate the health of the blood cells and to look for possible diseases. A urinalysis will be made to look for infections in the body and to determine if there are adequate balances of body substances such as sugar and protein.

To prepare your child for a pediatric examination, you should tell him that he will have to take off his clothes and be examined wearing underpants. Pediatricians report that some children are afraid to have their heads measured. Your child should know that the doctor will measure the size of his head, just as he will measure his height. You may want to reassure him that nothing else will be done to his head or to his hair. If your child is aware that shots are scheduled periodically for particular reasons, he is more likely to accept them as routine. Being innoculated should never be used as a threat to the child. If blood or urine tests are needed, these procedures should be explained to your child in advance.

The Neurologist: The neurologist will try to find out if your child's central nervous system is working properly. If not, he will try to determine what is causing the problem.

The neurologist will do a physical examination of your child, looking for problems not uncovered in a routine pediatric examination. He will investigate the ways in which your child uses language and how he thinks about his world. This is referred to as a "mental status" examination. For an infant, this is done by observing the child's alertness and responsiveness to such things as light and noise. If your child is older, the neurologist is likely to ask him questions about his school, friends, and personal interests. A sensory examination will be made to investigate your child's vision and hearing, because the senses are all related to the way in which the central nervous system works. When the neurologist is testing your child's vision, he will be trying to find out not only whether your child can see, but how he is able to use his eyes. Your child's motor system (voluntary muscles) will also be examined. The neurologist will want to know if your child's abilities are the same on both sides of his body, if there is a weakness in any of his limbs, and how well he can balance and coordinate his movements. Any involuntary movements or tremors will be noted.

An electroencephalograph (EEG) evaluates the electrical activity of the brain. Recordings will be taken while your child is awake, drowsy, asleep, and then waking up. This examination is particularly useful when your child is suspected of having a seizure disorder. You should be aware that the EEG alone is seldom the determining factor in a diagnosis. These results are usually combined with other findings from the child's examination before a diagnosis is made. You should also know that the EEG does not measure intelligence and does not directly relate to behavioral problems.

To help prepare your child for a neurological examination, explain to him that he will be examined while wearing his underwear. He should know that his eyes and ears will be tested and that he will be asked to do motor tasks such as lying down, standing up, hopping, walking, and running.

Testing your child's reflexes will be an important part of his neurological examination. You will want to describe these procedures to him. Besides testing knee jerk reflex with a rubber hammer, the doctor will test reflexes on the arms, jaw, ankles, soles of the feet, and in the anal area. To do this, he is likely to scratch the surface of the skin with a pointed metal instrument. This will probably tickle. The scratches do not break the skin.

Many children (and even adults) are fearful while an EEG recording is being made. It is important for your child to understand that the procedure is painless. He should be aware that he will probably lie down while the recording is being made, and that he will fall asleep and then wake up. You may need to ease your child's fear of going to sleep, because some children are afraid that they will not wake up. Your child should be told that electrodes will be pasted to his head and that when the examination is over, the cream that is used to attach the electrodes will be removed.

The Child Psychiatrist: The psychiatrist who works with you and your child will try to find out why your child is having emotional or adjustment problems, and will establish a treatment procedure with defined goals. Depending on your child's age, the psychiatrist will use different ways to communicate with him. The psychiatrist will use play techniques with young children, play and conversation with older children, and conversation alone with teenagers. By carefully listening and observing, he will be able to understand your child's view of his personal world. Through these meetings with your child and meetings with you as a parent, the psychiatrist tries to assess your child's emotional, intellectual, and social growth. He tries to understand the symptoms he observes, and establish whether these problems are temporary or long-term.

To prepare your child for a visit with a psychiatrist, he should be told that he will be alone with the doctor, who will play and talk with him. He should know that there will be no physical examination.

If your child is having trouble getting along with himself or with other people, he will probably be aware of it. It may be a relief for him to know that you have recognized the problem and, by contacting a child psychiatrist, are attempting to help. School-age children are usually receptive to the idea of visiting a doctor who understands their problems and talks and plays with them in order to be helpful.

The Orthopedic Specialist: The orthopedic specialist is concerned with problems in the muscular and skeletal system of the body. During the clinical examination, the specialist will assess muscle function and look at how abnormal muscle function contributes to the apparent physical deformity. Diagnosis also includes the use of X-rays. These are used to determine how bones and connective tissue, like tendons, are involved in the physical deformity.

The nature of your child's problem will determine the extent of his evaluation. In addition to the muscle and bone examination, your doctor may decide that certain special tests are required. These could include blood tests, bacteriological tests, biochemical tests, histological tests, and electrical tests.

To prepare your child for an examination by an orthopedic specialist, it will be important for you to find out ahead of time exactly what the examination will involve. The extent of your child's examination will depend upon the severity of his physical problems.

Your child should know that there will be a physical examination done in the doctor's office. In addition, X-rays will be taken, usually in a clinic or hospital. Certain tests can be performed in the doctor's office, but others must be done in a laboratory or in a hospital. Therefore, it is extremely important that your child be fully prepared for his examination.

The Ophthalmologist: The ophthalmologist is concerned with finding out how well your child can see and, if there is a problem, what is causing it. Therefore, your child will be given visual acuity tests to evaluate his vision. The muscles of his eyes will be examined to detect any problems in strength, eye coordination, or movement. The pupils of the eyes will be examined to find out how they react to light. After the eyes are dilated, the optic nerve and the retina will be examined.

You can help prepare your child for an ophthalmological examination. Even though it is painless, there are some unusual things about it. Some of the examination will be done in the dark. At one point, drops will be put in your child's eyes which may cause them to feel different. The doctor may ask him questions about something that he cannot see well. He should be prepared to do his best, but should not hesitate to tell the doctor exactly how it looks to him. An awareness of these circumstances can help to reduce your child's anxiety about his examination.

The Optometrist: The optometrist, much like the ophthalmologist, can evaluate your child's ability to see objects clearly and can prescribe glasses to correct vision problems. Some optometrists also specialize in diagnosing "visual perception" problems, which refers to the ability of the brain to interpret and understand what the eyes are seeing. There are many different aspects of visual perception that the optometrist might evaluate. For example, the optometrist might test your child's ability to follow a moving object with his eyes (tracking); the way your child's eyes and hands work together (fine eye-hand motor coordination); your child's ability to see objects properly in relation to a background (figure-ground perception); his ability to tell the difference between shapes which look alike but are different (visual discrimination); and his ability to remember sequences of letters which are shown to him for brief periods of time.

To prepare your child for an examination by an optometrist, he should be told that part of the examination will be done in the dark. He may have drops put in his eyes, and the doctor will ask him questions about how well he can see different objects. He should be prepared to do his best, but he should not hesitate to tell the doctor exactly how things look to him.

Your Child's Examination

THE PSYCHOLOGY PROFESSIONALS

The Psychologist: In order for the psychologist to do a complete assessment of your child, he needs to collect samples of your child's behavior. This is done by talking to members of your family, and by interviewing, observing, and testing your child.

During your child's examination, he may be given several different types of tests. Intelligence tests measure your child's ability to learn from experience and to cope with the problems of everyday life. There are many different kinds of intelligence tests designed to be used with different children. Your psychologist will choose one that is appropriate to use with your child.

Your child may be given a personality test, which gives the psychologist information concerning personal and social aspects of your child's world. There are two kinds of personality tests which may be given to your child. One type, called "projective tests," usually consists of inkblots or pictures, to which your child is asked to respond in his own way. The second type, called "personality inventories" or "rating scales" evaluates your child on the basis of the responses made by you or him, to statements which concern him.

There are special tests that help the psychologist determine if there is brain injury and, if so, what effect the injury has on your child's functioning. Such tests measure how your child receives information (input), what he does with the information that he receives (storage, understanding), and how he uses that information (output). Input and output tests include "design tests," in which a child is shown a design and asked to match it to another, copy it, or draw it from memory, as well as "fitting and assembling tests," in which a child puts puzzles together and fits pegs into holes. There are storage tests to evaluate memory. Tests of understanding include "concept formation" which has to do with the way the child discriminates and organizes information, and tests of learning, which evaluate how your child learns new information.

To prepare your child for a psychological examination, you will want to let him know that he will be alone with the psychologist. The psychologist will talk and play with him and do tests with him similar to those at school. Some of these tests will be paper-and-pencil, others may ask the child to answer questions, look at pictures, or play with certain toys. Your child should be aware that some of the tests may be difficult and that he is expected only to try his best.

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Your Child's Examination

THE EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS

The Educational Diagnostician: The diagnostician is concerned with finding out what your child knows or can do and how he learns best. Young children and mentally impaired children are usually evaluated in motor, language, and social skill areas. Checklists or developmental scales are used to determine what your child is capable of doing in each area. For older children, the diagnostician measures achievement in academic areas, especially reading and arithmetic. In the area of reading, the diagnostician will test your child's ability in word recognition, word analysis, and reading comprehension. To find out how your child learns best, the diagnostician may evaluate his auditory and visual-perceptual abilities.

To prepare your child for the evaluation performed by an educational diagnostician, you should tell him that the diagnostician will talk and play with him. He should also expect to be given some tests, which are like school tests. Some of these tests may be pencil-and-paper types, and others may involve looking at pcitures, answering questions, or playing with certain toys. Your child should know that these tests will help to find out why he has trouble with certain subjects and how he can improve.

The Speech Pathologist: When the speech pathologist examines your child, he wants to know how messages come in (reception), how they get organized in the brain (processing), and how they come out again in the form of speech (expression).

The first step in a speech evaluation is usually a hearing screening done by an audiologist, to determine if your child's hearing mechanism is functioning adequately. Because speech development depends upon visual reception, the speech pathologist is likely to check your child's eyesight.

The speech pathologist may use formal tests, informal interviews, and games to evaluate the language processing skills, such as comprehension. Because memory is important for language development, the speech pathologist may test your child's skill in remembering and repeating material he has heard or seen.

To evaluate the way a child speaks and expresses himself, the speech pathologist will observe his tone of voice, his pronunciation of words, the intelligibility of his words and sentences, and his ability to produce sounds. The speech pathologist also looks at the structure of the mouth, tongue, teeth, and jaw and how these parts work together to produce speech.

To prepare your child for his evaluation by a speech pathologist, he should be told that the purpose of the visit is to find out how his speech and hearing work, and how to help him when it is not working so well. It is useful for him to know that the first part of the examination will probably be a hearing test, where he may wear earphones and listen to sounds. He will then work with the speech pathologist who will talk and play with him and give him tests similar to those at school.

The Audiologist: During an examination, the audiologist will test your child's ability to hear simple sounds, as well as the complicated sounds of everyday speech. Sounds differ from each other in intensity (loudness) and frequency (pitch). Therefore, the tests used with your child will take into account both loudness and pitch.

The audiologist will use an air conduction evaluation to see how different sounds, carried through the air, are processed by your child's ear. A bone conduction test makes it possible to find out whether your child is able to hear, even though parts of his ear may not be functioning. Speech reception tests determine the loudness level at which your child can identify or repeat common words. Speech discrimination tests evaluate your child's ability to hear differences between words.

To prepare your child for an audiological examination, you will want to describe the setting to him. Testing is usually done in a soundproof booth or small room. Parents are often asked to accompany younger children into the booth. The audiologist usually remains outside and observes through a window. With younger children, test sounds are presented through loudspeakers. Older children wear headphones for the testing.

The Physical Therapist: The physical therapy examination consists of observation and formal testing in several areas. The therapist will measure for range of motion, to see how much free movement there is in your child's body joints. His muscle tone will be observed for signs of tightness or looseness. The physical therapist will check to see if your child has voluntary control of his muscles. Your child will be observed to find out how skillful he is at getting around in his world. Does he have problems in crawling, walking, or moving about? Can he climb stairs? The therapist will also observe your child's reflexes to find out about the development of his nervous system. Your child will be observed doing various activities of daily living. The therapist wants to know how much assistance he needs to do these tasks.

To prepare your child for an examination by a physical therapist, he should be told about the equipment that will be in the examination room. The room will probably contain mats, mirrors, toys, a bed, a small set of stairs, and parallel bars. You may tell your child that he will be given a chance to play. He will also be asked to do certain things, such as walking up the stairs, taking off outer clothing, or rolling over in the bed. The physical therapist will need to move certain parts of your child's body such as his arms, legs, and feet. It will help to relieve your child's anxiety if he knows what to expect.

The Occupational Therapist: The occupational therapist will want to observe your child during free play to find out how he deals with his particular disabilities, and how he attempts to compensate for them. In addition, the therapist may want to do several formal tests. A motor accuracy test, where your child traces around an outlined object, will show how well he is able to coordinate his hand movements with what he sees. A muscle test might be used to find out how strong an individual muscle or set of muscles is. A range of motion test will indicate how much free movement there is in your child's body joints. An activities of daily living test determines which self-care tasks your child can perform.

To prepare your child for an examination by an occupational therapist, he should be told that he will be in a setting similar to a playroom. There, he will be given an opportunity to play freely and will also be asked to do certain tasks, like moving various parts of his body or performing activities of daily living, such as combing his hair or dressing.

The Follow-up Conference

All professionals schedule conferences or interviews in order to communicate the results of their evaluation to you. These may be called follow-up conferences, feedback sessions, interpretive interviews, or just family conferences. If your child's evaluations have been coordinated by a single person, such as a physician or psychologist, that person will probably obtain all the necessary reports and hold a conference individually with you. If you are working through a school, clinic, or some other institutional setting, you will probably receive feedback information from a diagnostic team. This will include the various professionals who have examined your child and who may be involved in plans for future treatment.

The follow-up conference will generally begin with a review of the reason your child was originally referred for services. You should be prepared to review the feelings you had at the time of the referral, and to discuss any changes which have occurred since the onset of services.

Following the review, professional findings will be presented. This presentation should be made in language you understand. It should include a description of what the professional did, what he was observing or testing for, and what the results were. A diagnosis should be made based on the examination results. At this point, you will probably have questions, which you should not hesitate to ask. You should make sure that you clearly understand all the terms used to describe the examination and your child's behavior. You should ask for further information if you feel that it would help you to better understand the diagnosis.

After the diagnosis, treatment recommendations will be made. Here again, it is your responsibility to make sure that you understand exactly what is being recommended, and what your child's treatment will mean in terms of cost, time, and effort on the part of everyone who will be involved. You should ask the professional for a written copy of his [illegible] for your records. You will want to have a copy of his [illegible]mendations as you make arrangements for any treatment procedures.

The advent of the child advocacy movement, and the renewed interest in children's rights, has resulted in children sometimes being included in follow-up conferences. Although adolescents can be readily included in these conferences in selected cases, younger children have rarely been involved. If your child or adolescent is to be a participant, you should discuss this in advance with him and with the professionals who will be present at the conference. Careful consideration must be given to your child's sensitivity about accepting such an open discussion of his problems.

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Obtaining Another Professional Opinion

There are times when you may want additional professional opinions concerning your handicapped child. Having more than one professional opinion accomplishes two things. First, the conclusions drawn by one professional seem more sound when another professional reaches the same conclusions. Therefore, obtaining a second professional opinion can serve as a check on the accuracy and validity of the original opinion. Also, the second professional may add useful information about your child's condition, enhancing your understanding of your child's problem.

To go about obtaining an additional professional opinion, you may request a referral from your family doctor, your local community mental health center, a child clinic located in a university or hospital, an educational professional, or any other professional who has dealt with your child.

The Parent as a Permanent Partner

After your child has been evaluated and treatment recommendations have been initiated, you, as a parent, should remain actively involved in his program. If you have agreed with a professional to carry out a specific treatment, it is your responsibility to see that this is done. It is also your responsibility to monitor your child's reaction to a plan of treatment. Treatment that works at one age may be a complete failure when the child is a year older. One teacher may be able to carry out a plan quite well, while another is a dismal failure. You may make every effort to follow the directions of a professional but find that you are unable to, or that the plans just do not work. Then it is your responsibility to communicate these problems to the professional, so that appropriate modifications can be made. In any case, you should arrange for periodic follow-up, in order to assess your child's progress.

As a parent, you must be continually involved in the medical, psychological, educational, and social services provided for your handicapped child. You are the manager of your child's program, and you must be certain that it meets his special needs.

Quick Reference Chart

A quick reference chart for determining the professionals who should be contacted to provide services to children with various handicapping conditions.

	Type of Handicapping Condition								
	Levels of Mental Retardation								
	Educable	Trainable	Severe & Profound	Visual Impairment	Hearing Impairment	Physical Impairment	Emotional Disturbance	Learning Disability	Other
MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS									
Pediatrician	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	
Neurologist	S	S	S			S	S	N	1
Child Psychiatrist							N	S	2
Orthopedist						N			
Ophthalmologist				N				S	
Optometrist				N				S	
PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFESSIONALS									
Clinical Psychologist							N	S	2
School Psychologist	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	
EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS									
Educational Diagnostician	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	
Special Education Teacher	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	
Speech Pathologist		S	S		N				3
Audiologist					N			S	3
Physical Therapist		S	S			N			4
Occupational Therapist		S	S			N			
SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONALS									
Social Worker	S	S	S	S	S	S	N	S	

KEY: N Necessary
S Suggested

1 - all children with seizures
2 - children with behavioral or adjustment problems
3 - children with disorders of communication
4 - children with motor problems

NOTE: If your child is multi-handicapped, you should contact the proper professionals to deal with each handicapping condition.